

Hospice

What is hospice?

The term hospice was used in medieval times to refer to a lodging for travelers where they could be refreshed and looked after on their journeys. Today hospice refers to a concept of compassionate care for people in the final phase of an incurable illness.

If you have a life expectancy of 6 months or less, hospice or home health care may be a better choice for your care than a hospital. Also, if your family or friends can no longer look after you at home, you might want to consider hospice. Usually referrals to hospice are made by your primary physician. Referrals can also be made by family, friends, clergy, or other health care professionals.

Hospice seeks neither to hasten nor postpone death. The emphasis is on quality of life and dignity. Hospice recognizes not only your physical needs by controlling pain, but also your social, emotional, and spiritual needs. Hospice hopes to prepare you for a peaceful death at home or in a homelike setting.

Treating the whole person

Hospice includes you and your entire family as the unit of care. You and your family are directly involved in making decisions. Whenever possible, you are encouraged to make decisions about your treatment, your relationships, personal business, and preferences about burial and memorial services. Grief counseling is provided for your family.

Providing a team approach

The team approach is essential to the hospice philosophy. Services are provided by a team of trained professionals: doctors, nurses, clergy, social workers, therapists, aides, and volunteers. The team members address your medical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual needs.

Controlling pain

Even in some of the most painful forms of cancer, 95% of the time you can be given pain-relieving drugs that allow you to feel almost no pain. Usually the dosage can be kept at a level that also allows you to remain alert. Hospice staff members are trained in the best methods of pain control and symptom management to ensure that you are as comfortable as possible.

Types of hospices

Hospice can offer help and support at any time, day or night, 7 days a week. Usually care is offered at home. In some towns there are independent inpatient hospices with no ties to a hospital. Some hospitals and nursing homes have wings used for hospice care. If both your home and an inpatient facility are available, you may spend time in both places.

Cost of hospice

Studies have shown that hospice care often costs less than conventional care during the last 6 months of life. Usually less high-cost technology is used, and family, friends, and volunteers may provide much of your daily care.

For more information

For more information about hospice or to locate a hospice in your area, write or call:

National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization
1700 Diagonal Road
Suite 300
Alexandria, Virginia 22314
Hospice help line: 1-800-658-8898
Web site: <http://www.nhpco.org>

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